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An All-African Peace Force:

An Immediate Option or Long-Term Goal for the Region?

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Conclusions

- The social and political disintegration in Burundi has prompted calls from the United States for intervention by an all-African force. The concept of an African force for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations has substantial support in Africa and in important outside countries. Yet it is not realistic to rely upon an all-African military force for Burundi.
- Africans have serious problems with the idea of being used by outsiders who will not participate directly themselves. For Burundi, they also worry about the exact nature of the mission. Regardless of their political will, potential African contributors seriously lack a number of military capabilities that would be essential for success if they were thrown into Burundi today.
- A sound strategy for Burundi and other African contingencies in the near-term must continue to be based upon the leadership of the United States and other Western powers, including some participation as part of any force. This participation is required not just for political reasons (such as guaranteeing the non-alignment of any African military force). Several African states can make substantial contributions to an African force, but they will require international assistance with key personnel and equipment, as well as assurances that their contingents will be paid.
- Burundi offers an important opportunity to begin developing an all-African peace force. If the international community were to take a strategic view of regional stability, it could participate in a joint operation in Burundi in order to improve the capabilities of African contributors and, by extension, the long-term prospects for a regional solution to future African problems.

Background

In confronting the growing crisis in Burundi before it turns into another genocidal upheaval, the United States, the international community, and the UN have been exploring the establishment of an all-African contingent for peace operations. It was not possible to mobilize such a force for Rwanda and it probably will not be possible for Burundi. However, the idea of an African peace force for future contingencies is very much alive. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) is expanding its conflict resolution capabilities while the United States, France, United Kingdom, and Nordic countries have a number of on-going programs to develop peace operations capabilities across the continent.

Political considerations will play a large role in determining which African countries participate in future peace operations. However, political factors will ultimately be irrelevant to the development of a viable African military force for peace operations if the Africans cannot field adequate military capabilities. This paper summarizes the present and prospective military capabilities and limitations of such a force. It also considers means of strengthening the capacity of African military establishments to respond to future crises.

Why An All-African Force for Peace Operations?

A stand-by force of African military units ready to respond to peace operations and humanitarian disasters on the continent is the logical extension of several developments. One is the UN's and the international community's increasing emphasis on regional solutions for regional problems. Like CARICOM in Latin America and the Baltic Battalion in the Baltics, an all-African force could become an important institutional mechanism for fostering greater regional integration and conflict resolution.

Second, by promoting regional stability-the prerequisite to virtually every other U.S. objective in Africa. Can an all-African force capable of humanitarian and peace operations would underwrite the Clinton Administration's National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement. An important by-product of an international effort to train and equip such a force would be an improvement in the professionalism of participating militaries, thereby building greater respect for civilian control and stable democracies. Finally, an all-African peace force is valuable to the international community for the most pragmatic of reasons. It potentially would limit the extent to which Western militaries must become involved on the ground in Africa, while still providing a capability for effective crisis response.

The Current Limitations of African Militaries

Under current conditions an intervention by an all-African force in Burundi would be a serious mistake. Not only could it do little to prevent disaster in Burundi, but it also would risk pushing a good idea too far, too fast. The bottom-line is that sub-Saharan African states simply lack the military capabilities to conduct a successful humanitarian or peace operation on their own. Although they can probably handle a mostly peaceful environment, it is all too easy to envision a Burundi operation turning into another ECOMOG-the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group peace force that, at times, was embroiled in Liberia's civil war. A failed African peace operation might require Western intervention to rescue the force. Furthermore, the failure of an African force in Burundi could quash any further regional interest in an all-African force.

Near-term limitations on an African peace force are as much structural as political in nature. The African states lack the military capabilities to handle any but the most benign contingencies. Although we may hope for peaceful environments in Burundi and elsewhere, it would be foolish to plan on them. Beyond protecting itself, a peace force in Africa typically might be required to provide security for refugee "safe havens," to create and secure one or more air hubs for relief missions, and to provide safe transit for relief convoys on the ground. These functions all require solid military capabilities. Moreover, such operations might require, at a minimum, a force of two to three robust brigades. Approximately 12,000 personnel. For a Burundi operation, the UN reportedly is using planning estimates of 20,000 personnel.

There are three fundamental structural problems with African forces trying to cope with such operations on their own: size, capabilities, and experience.

Size

Finding Enough African Battalions

The heart and muscle of an all-African peace force must be militarily competent and adequately equip-ped infantry battalions. Although some pre-mission training and provision of equipment is the norm for UN operations, the contributing countries are expected to provide military forces that are ready to operate. Individual soldiers should have shoes, uniforms, personal weapons, and ammunition-in good condition. Companies should have enough supplies to operate in the field, and battalions should have sufficient communications capabilities to communicate with their subunits. All of these units should be able to provide armored transportation for their soldiers within the area of operations.

The number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that can meet these criteria in the near-term is small. Even by skimming equipment off the rest of their military units in order to equip their peace force units, only eight countries could contribute reasonably equipped units that are basically ready to participate. They include: Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

Two-Nigeria and South Africa-for divergent reasons, should not soon participate in an all-African peace force. Nigeria's political regime and poor record in ECOMOG rule it out of an all-African force absent dramatic change. South Africa, on the other hand, is undertaking a thorough transformation of its government, its civil society, and, its military. Although South Africa has enormous potential, a regional commitment of its military forces would be premature.

The remaining six countries possess professional, competent militaries that would require some training and equipment. Given their own security requirements, the size of their militaries, and their commitments to existing operations, the number of battalions that they can currently commit to an all-African force is limited. The small size of the armed forces in Botswana (7,000 personnel), Ghana (5,000), and Senegal (12,000) mean that they can be counted on to provide at most a battalion each.

The Ethiopian, Kenyan, and Zimbabwean armed forces are much larger in size, and can contribute more than a battalion each. The Ethiopian military is undergoing a fundamental reorganization to integrate former rebel forces; is currently engaged in operations on its borders with Somalia and Sudan; and suffers from equipment short-falls. It can contribute perhaps two battalions. Kenya could contribute as many as three battalions. Zimbabwe has committed a battalion to UNAVEM III in Angola, probably limiting its contribution to no more than two battalions.

If all six of these states were willing (and the international community agreed to equip and train them) they could collectively contribute perhaps 10 battalions-the bare minimum that would probably be required. Other countries like Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia have expressed enthusiasm for a regional force, but experience demonstrates that even after substantial augmentation, these militaries could provide limited capabilities.

Capabilities

Providing Key Mission Components

Signals/Communications. If the force were at risk of encountering hostile forces (as it surely would be in Burundi), it would require substantial signals equipment to facilitate communications between the various battalions and with the mission headquarters. Besides South Africa, none of the sub-Saharan

militaries have adequate brigade-level communications capabilities.

Today, the six potential contributors could provide signals only for their own battalions. For communications between the battalions and various national contingents, the African force would require substantial external assistance in the form of training and equipment. The best model for this assistance would be to designate a single national contingent to provide all of the signals for the entire operation.

Transportation. None of the potential contributors possess adequate airlift or ground transport capabilities. When pressed, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe have used their national airlines to move troops and personal equipment. But none can be counted on to lift the requisite heavy equipment, supplies, and humanitarian relief. This is one area where a potential African force will rely entirely on Western assistance. Support would have to include aircraft, helicopters and their flight and maintenance crews, as well as additional vehicles (and maintenance assistance) for ground transportation.

Logistics. None of the potential contributors possesses enough skilled logisticians or a deployable network for its own forces, let alone a multinational force. Indeed, they often have trouble keeping their forces supplied even when deployed within their own borders. For potential operations over the next several years, this is another area where the larger international community will likely be required to assist with the logistics infrastructure and the personnel to operate it.

Other Equipment. In addition to universal shortages in equipment such as helicopters and armored personnel carriers, some of the potential key contributors also have shortages in items such as tentage, the soldier's basic kit, and maintenance for small equipment.

Experience

Coordinating a Multinational Peace Operation

Effective coordination of all the aspects of a potential all-African peace force will be an enormously complex task. The mission coordination headquarters will have to manage a multi-brigade infantry force that speaks different languages and that has a variety of interoperability problems: e.g., operating procedures, mentality, terminology, and equipment. It will have to handle logistics for the force as well as humanitarian relief supplies for civilians. The headquarters will also have to coordinate its military operations with the activities of participating international and non-governmental organizations. These tasks would be difficult in a peaceful environment, but their complexity would increase exponentially in hostile surroundings.

Today, none of the potential Sub-Saharan African contributors possess the capability to deploy an effective headquarters for a multi-brigade (e.g., +12,000 personnel) peace operation in any but the most peaceful of environments. Although Ethiopia conducted multi-brigade combat operations in its civil war, this experience predates the complete reorganization of its military. Kenya has some notable experience conducting large-scale combined arms operations on its border, but it has virtually no experience coordinating multi-national forces. Zimbabwe's and Botswana's officer staffs have had considerable training for such operations through map and command post exercises, but their operational experience is extremely limited.

Building this type of headquarters capability will take time and some on-the-ground Western involvement. Map and command post exercises can help train for benign contingencies, but there are

few substitutes for actual experience in hostile environments. Until the all-African peace force develops its own experience, effective coordination will likely require a substantial presence of Western military personnel as advisers in the headquarters unit and may require key Western personnel in the field to facilitate coordination. If recent peace operations experience in Africa teaches one lesson, it is that African militaries tend to perform far better when they are working with a degree of Western participation (e.g., UNITAF), than when they are all alone (e.g., ECOMOG).

Recommendations

- The United States and other Western countries should begin promoting an African stand-by peace force by enhancing African capabilities for peace operations, humanitarian response missions, and the maintenance of regional stability.
- An all-African force should not be pursued as a solution for the situation in Burundi or any other near-term contingency. If an intervention force must be mounted in the near-term, the United States and other Western countries will need to be directly involved on the ground for military as well as political reasons if there is to be any prospect of success.
- The United States should tailor its security assistance efforts to establish an all-African force over the longer term, and look for ways to harmonize its security assistance with other nations involved in the region, particularly France and the United Kingdom.

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